(v) Suggest strategies for sustained growth of exports from the chemical sector.

(vi) Suggest steps to be taken for introducing changes and measures to enable the industry to become and remain competitive in the post WTO environment.

(vii) Suggest ways and means of strengthening R&D in the chemicals sector.

(viii) Identify measures such that Indian scientists in the chemical sector could take advantage of India's strength in the IT Sector to create intellectual property.

(ix) Identify appropriate institutions, in close cooperation with which, training and skill development for the human resource in the chemical sector could be undertaken.

(x) Suggest machinery which could, on a continuing basis, identify areas of further growth and work inclose coordiantion with the industry.

(xi) Indentify steps to be taken for providing infrastructure for the synergistic development of the chemical industry, and

(xii) Suggest ways of promoting worker' safety, health and environment and Responsible Care.

The Report of the Task Force is expected by the end of December, 2001.

Rail Infrastructure in NF Railway

*477. DR. ARUN KUMAR SARMA: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to refer to answer to Unstarred Question 976 given in the Rajya Sabha on 2nd March, 2001, and state:

(a) whether the final location survey report for Bogibeel project has become available; if so, whether the final clearance has been processed and the work taken up;

(b) the schedule for completion, the work completed so far, the target achieved and target works remaining; and

(c) the proposals received by the Ministry from the divisions of the NF Railway for improvement of the Rail infrastructure in the region and the action taken on them?

THE MINISTER OF RAILWAYS (SHRI NITISH KUMAR): (a) and (b) Final Location Survey report has become available and is presently under examination in consultation with the Railways. The work would be taken up after the report is finalized. The work would be progressed depending upon availability of resources in the coming years.

(c) Seven proposals for gauge conversion and traffic facilities for improvement of the rail infrastructure were received from N.F. Railway. Three of these proposals have since been included in the Railway Budget 2001-02.

Cut in Railway expenditure

*478. SHRI NARENDRA MOHAN: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the operating ratio of the Railways has been worsening over the years, rising to 98.8 per cent, as per the estimates of 2000-2001;

(b) if so, whether the Railways are considering to launch an all-out drive to cut its expenditure, without cutting the current plan size, in any way;

(c) what are the Major Heads under which expenditure is proposed to be cut and what is the targeted percentage of cut; and

(d) what was the actual operating cost in 2000-2001 *viz-a-viz* the estimates for that year?

THE MINISTER OF RAILWAYS (SHRI NITISH KUMAR): (a) to (c) Yes Sir. The operating ratio of the Railways has been deteriorating since 1995-96 mainly due to implementation of the recommendations of the Vth Central Pay Commission which increased the working expenses inordinately due to steep rise in the staff costs on Railways. The Ordinary Working Expenses rose from Rs. 16186 crore in 1996-97 to Rs. 27534 crore in 2000-01 (Provl.) registering a growth of 70%. The pension expenditure also increased from Rs. 2509 crore to around Rs. 5100 crore during this period, an increase of almost 100%. The earnings, however, could not keep pace with the growth in expenditure mainly due to sharp reduction in loading in 1998-99 as a result of economic slow-down. The combined effect of increase in staff expenditure and the earnings not keeping pace has resulted in deterioration of the Operating Ratio. In 2000-01, the operating ratio was originally budgeted at 98.8% but it has marginally improved to 98.3% (Provisional) in the actuals.